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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ROLLOUT SHOWS UZBEKS' TRUE
COLORS (AGAIN)

Classified By: AMB. JON R. PURNELL, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Authorities reportedly used threats, house arrest, and beatings to prevent several human rights activists from attending the Embassy's reception to launch the 2006 Human Rights Report. Government officials, for the second straight year, failed to attend. DCM raised the issue with Foreign Ministry contacts, who suggested only that Post must have "incomplete information" on the alleged harassment. Despite officials' declarations that they intend to work toward improved relations, the government's actions demonstrate that Uzbekistan's attitude toward human rights has not changed. End summary.

¶2. (C) Approximately 50 guests attended the Ambassador's March 14 reception to launch the 2006 Human Rights Report. The guest list was shorter than at a similar event last year, in part due to the 2006 closure of several human rights organizations and the arrest of several activists who had attended the previous year's presentation. However, the major opposition political groups, local human rights organizations, journalists from the few surviving Western news agencies, and diplomatic missions still sent representatives.

¶3. (C) Several human rights contacts reported that they had decided not to attend the Ambassador's reception due to pressure from the authorities. National Security Service officers reportedly threatened to have the son of Margilon-based activist Abdusalom Ergashev expelled from his school if Ergashev attended the event. Bukhara-based activists Vohid Karimov and Shuhrat Ganiev were allegedly threatened with unspecified "problems" with visas and traveling. Abdurahmon Tashanov of the opposition Birlik Party was reportedly told that he would have "real problems" if he attended. Activist Komil Ashurov of Samarkand reported that unidentified men had attacked him and beaten him on the street the day before he planned to travel to Tashkent. Jizzak activist Bakhtiyor Hamroyev sent his regrets, saying he was under house arrest, his apartment building surrounded by unmarked police vehicles. The day before the reception, according to Margilon activist Ahmadjon Madmarov, local police detained his son for hours of questioning, and Tashkent police commandeered Madmarov's taxi in connection with an unspecified "investigation" after he arrived in Tashkent. However, Madmarov attended the report presentation and remained in Tashkent until the end of the week to meet with visiting USOSCE Ambassador Julie Finley on March 16. One journalist told emboffs that National Security Service

officials had instructed activists to discourage others from attending the event. As in the previous year, government officials stayed away from the event, though they were invited. Even officials of the Foreign Ministry's Americas Department failed to attend, despite having confirmed multiple times that they would come.

¶4. (C) The DCM raised government threats against and harassment of human rights activists not to attend the rollout with the Foreign Ministry's acting Americas Division Chief Tokhir Mamadjanov on March 16 as sending the same old message on human rights and stooping to new lows. Mamadjanov responded that we must have "incomplete information" on the alleged intimidation, and that there must be other explanations. DCM also expressed regret at the government's decision in the end not to send anyone to the rollout. (Note: Only the day before the event, Americas Desk Director phoned DCM to say he and Mamadjanov would be coming. End note.) Mamadjanov, eyes lowered to the table, said nothing in response.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Human Rights Report release fell only days after a visit by SCA DAS Evan Feigenbaum, which Uzbek officials had heralded as a signal of improving bilateral relations. However, the absence of any Uzbek official at the reception, and the reported pressure on human rights activists not to attend, sent a very different message. Certain officials may be prepared to grant occasional meetings to discuss human rights issues, but the Government of Uzbekistan is not yet prepared to demonstrate respect for human rights, or for those who seek to defend them.

PURNELL